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A More Perfect European Union?: The Transnational Networks of the EU's Embassy Open House in Washington, DC

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Annually, the Delegation of the European Union in Washington, DC, holds an embassy open house day for its 27 member nations to celebrate European culture and educate tourists on the functions of EU politics and international relations. Amidst an ongoing debt crisis and a continuing exploration of its identity as a supranational entity, "Embassy Day" affords an opportunity to see the EU as a spatial network uneasily caught in the tensions between the often nostalgic nationalism of its constituent countries and the future-oriented technocratic transnationalism of its composite alliance. By analyzing the cultural artifacts of Embassy Day from its handouts, maps, speeches, architecture, and performances, I treat Embassy Day as a "rhetorical experience" and the EU embassies as a transnational network imposed over the city space of DC. In the process, I argue that the very fragmented nature of the open house's complex simulation of Europe mirrors the fragmented nature of European identity itself, and thus displays the anxiety around how the EU places itself and its power vis-à-vis the global community.

On Saturday, May 12, 2012, my wife and I, along with a couple of good friends, set out with a brochure map, empty stomachs, and tote bags (to fill with souvenir swag and tourist literature) for the European Union's annual Embassy Open House in Washington, DC, titled that year "A Shortcut to Europe." All 27 EU embassies (including the soon-to-be-ratified Croatia) opened their doors to throngs of Europhile tourists, looking for a glimpse into the often-sealed life of DC diplomacy. A record number tallied at 106,498 visitors poured in throughout the proceedings.¹ For one six-hour day, this was an intense proposition: no mere mortal could possibly make it to every country (we made it to eight, which we thought was impressive), resulting in a kind of virtual European experience constructed by the audiences themselves. In our own cherry-picked line-up of embassies, we watched traditional Lithuanian folk dancing, peered into the lush living quarters of the Dutch ambassador, filled out (and failed) a quiz on recent EU legislation at the Delegation headquarters, got pitched by representatives of a Slovenian water bottle corporation, ate pierogis at the Polish Embassy, and wandered into a DVD presentation about Estonia's "Singing Revolution." Through their diverse and disparate embassies (in both architecture and in their presentations to visitors), the European Union created a bustling and unified circuitry of transnationalism—light security checks, surveillance, and cordoned-off rooms were ever-present, but mostly mitigated by a

friendly celebratory spirit, gentle nationalistic pride, and a genuine energy to promote the inclusionary practices of the European Union and its grand future.

Of course, while we ate gazpacho in Spain and peered at centuries-old tapestries in the Netherlands, across the Atlantic the EU saw itself continually mired in political and economic turmoil. “Sarkozy is Latest Leader Booted From Office Amid European Financial Crisis”; “Greece to Undergo New Election Next Month After Coalition Talks Collapse in Acrimony”; and “Will Irish Vote Deal Mortal Blow to Europe’s Deficit-Fighting Treaty?” were just a few of the headlines in the surrounding week around the Euro-festivities in Washington, DC.² In short, it was difficult to reconcile the hopeful “unity in diversity” spirit of Embassy Day with the bitter politics of the EU’s rupture over the stark reality of austerity measures across the continent. And certainly, since the comparatively benign summer of 2012, these ruptures within the notion of a European Union have only widened, for example, with Ukraine’s stark struggle between a future marked by EU cosmopolitanism or Russian nationalism. Such a divide speaks to the complexity and challenge of the European Union’s agenda to fashion a stable identity. These challenges are both spatial and temporal: there exists the geopolitical difficulty of European integration as the Union expands amidst a turbulent globalized landscape, as well as the continual rhetorical work needed to reconcile public memories of Europe’s past with its focus on looking forward and strengthening its viability. The almost childlike wonder we experienced as we traveled to each embassy was belied by the fact that we were in the midst of a highly managed and strategic network of “nation branding,” an effort of public diplomacy that became especially prevalent during the post-Cold War movements toward neoliberal globalization wherein European governments often collaborated at great expense with professional public relations firms to craft their national identities as consumable commodities for international audiences (Kaneva, 2012). The impressive displays and glossy literature that we consumed at each stop were one part of an important opportunity for the European diplomatic corps

to carry out a mission of soft power and vie for, in a sense, a competitive market share for individual nations in the larger Union (Davis Cross, 2013).

Thus, while the spirit was festive and centered on typical cultural curios of each nation, Embassy Day was no apolitical soiree—at the heart of the EU’s opening of its member embassies in DC was a kind of strategic knowledge production, an ideological exchange, and a fashioning of histories and futures on a host of national and international levels. In his welcome speech at the Slovenian embassy on California Ave. (formerly the site of the Yugoslavian embassy), Ambassador Roman Kirn spoke poignantly of his “old nation but young state” dealing with a tumultuous past at the hands of empires, federations and sweeping national projects. For Kirn, there was no overstating the power of national pride—he credited their language with “allowing Slovenia to survive” and noted how their public squares featured statues of “poets, not warriors,” as he detailed his nation’s overtures to peace. Yet while Kirn’s address recrafted national history, both in terms of connecting with a powerful and often mythic Slovenian past, he was quick to note the nation’s happy, submissive integration into the EU, which Kirn celebrated as the “best thing to happen to Slovenia since before World War II” (Kirn, 2012). Here, as Kirn spoke, he was standing in the very space that used to be the Yugoslavian embassy, now remodeled and modernized into a sleek but inviting modern layout, bright and open. Meanwhile, representatives of Slovenian “green” industry engaged with tourists, and sculptor Lucka Koscak discussed her serene “Angels” exhibit—simple heads and armless torsos featuring faces with meditative expressions, with a promotional card sporting the slogan “Conscious About How Marvelous Life Is” (Embassy of the Republic of Slovenia, 2012). Such a mash-up of Slovenian culture spoke to both a tumultuous but proud past and a hopeful future. At the same time, though, Zala Volcic (2012) has pinpointed Slovenia, for example, as one of the most successful but also problematic cases of “commercial nationalism” in the post-communist era, “whereby the creation of a sense of national identity is taken on by the commercial sector as a form

of marketing, while the injunction to identify with the nation is equated with a form of consumption” (p. 148). In this way, both Kirn’s words and the space of political and cultural activities around him (including the display of the collaboration between the Slovenian government and private corporations) struck at the tense balancing act between nationalism and supranationalism that marks the rhetorical constructions of EU member identities, a tension that was both visually and discursively on display in Embassy Day’s wider promotion of the European Union and its member nations as a worldwide political and cultural force.

EU’s open house event arranges both the opportunities and challenges of the Union’s development and puts them on display, imbuing the EU’s global image onto a network of localized experiences over the Washington cityspace. As we wandered the EU network of embassies over DC’s urban landscape, and entered in and out of these charged places of European cultural and politics, we bore witness to that complex fusion between time and space in the production of identity. For what is perhaps most compelling about Embassy Day is that the identity created is never a stable one—the EU cannot fully direct and order the experiences of its tourists wandering the network, particularly as they encounter a series of competing nation “brands” that construct often conflicting national identities and goals. The branding efforts of individual embassies during Embassy Day do not necessarily contradict the EU’s goal of promoting its “unity in diversity” theme, but they do tend to reveal the complex challenges that both member nations and the EU itself face in communicating cohesive and coordinated messages. Through these fragments of European culture, politics, and public diplomacy we see the incompleteness of a truly European identity and the contentiousness of the EU’s presentation of citizenship as a consumptive enterprise. Despite being an EU sponsored event and representing the Union’s supranational umbrella, Embassy Day constantly reminded visitors that these sites were not EU embassies by any means, but remained national, bilateral embassies designed to carry out specific national missions.

Thus, I argue here that in this attempt to construct a unified experience over its network of embassies, the EU idealizes its democratic and unifying accomplishments, while problematically balancing a variety of contentious national histories. On one hand, Embassy Day re-creates today's European Union as an idealized version of itself; a virtual compression of European time and space that directs messy pasts and diverse geopolitics of European nation states toward a unified space and common future. "Shortcut to Europe" is an apt term here, as the program locates the European Union as an ideal place and gives us a chance to see the EU as a rhetorical *export*, detached from its borders and transcended from its legal and economic infighting, and transposed onto the grid of Washington, DC. In a 1978 *Washington Post* article, style editor Sarah Booth Conroy noted that "In Washington, embassies are our modern-day palaces, marble manifestations of the way the nations of the world wish to present themselves to other countries" (p. L3). And certainly, a prominent element of Embassy Day is to impress potential tourists with the opportunities that the EU provides and to fashion a particular image of a progressive and united, but culturally diverse, Europe. Alternatively and importantly though, I argue that the very fragmented nature of Embassy Day's representation of Europe in its mixture of sights, sounds, and tastes is a synecdoche for the fragmented nature of European identity itself, as individual nations attempt to market themselves as commodities, and thus displays the anxieties around how the EU *places* itself vis-à-vis the global community. The unifying project of the EU is challenged by the differing foreign policy objectives evident in the public diplomacy deliberately fashioned at each embassy on the network, thus making *difference* as much as unity a part of the day's communicative power.

To make these arguments, I will begin by exploring how the material experience of Embassy Day is based on a unique transnational network cast onto the city of Washington, DC, and how embassies themselves serve as important sites of contestation. Then I focus on two compelling rhetorical tensions that arise out of Embassy Day's re-creation of the European Union: 1) the spatial

relationship between nationalism and transnationalism, particularly in how borders and mobilities construct powerful definitions around what *is* Europe and what is *not*, and how the EU works to champion its vast variety of ethnicities and nations, while attempting to project “one voice” even as the members simultaneously challenge that voice; and 2) the tensions between European past and European future, where democratic traditions are revived or created anew from a never too-distant history of fascism and communism, and fashioned against long-simmering nationalisms. This essay engages these tensions by critically examining a host of discursive and non-discursive materials from Embassy Day as strategic forms of public diplomacy and national and international communication, from promotional literature to architectural details to maps, art installations, and video. Altogether, this approach has potential importance for scholars in emphasizing the European Union as an ongoing communicative process, steeped in the interplay of various forms of popular media, where a sense of a stable cultural and political identity must be consistently reproduced, guarded, and maintained.

Networks, City Space, and the Rhetorical Experience of Embassies

The entire network of EU’s Embassy Day invokes an appreciation of rhetoric as both material and experiential—beyond merely *representing* the new European Union, the tourist’s traversal of the embassy network is an enactment of the European Union’s peculiar appropriations of space and time; a site where identities are performed.³ The meaning-making of a swirl of texts like Embassy Day comes out of the connections we make from building to building, and the material and virtual flows that criss-cross the collection of embassies (Mitchell, 2005, p. 19). Embassy Day, then, gives us a physical map to bring around with us, but more importantly creates a mental map that orders our own navigation around the network, through the personal interactions and observations at each stop, the photos taken, the websites consulted, the brochures compiled, and much more. The Embassy Day’s tourist constructs a European Union out of this multitude of scraps

and bits. But, of course, Embassy Day is not *only* these fragments—it is also always defined in terms of its relationship with the *actual* spaces of Europe. As Jeff Rice (2012) has written,

the power of networks comes not from the identification of certain ‘things’ and how they connect, but from the process of connections themselves. Generalized to a ‘thing’ like a city space or map, the emphasis shifts from pure analysis or representation to working with the types of connections that may or may not be generated within the space’s various processes. The emphasis, in other words, is rhetorical as it teaches another perspective regarding how spaces are organized, arranged, and delivered (p. 44).

Subscribing to this idea of a network then allows an emphasis on process and relationship, rather than just text and meaning. In this way, Embassy Day can be conceived as what Gregory Clark (2010) has called a “rhetorical experience.” For Clark, “experience is always located. It is a construct made from our encounters with places—including the people and events those places comprise—that gives us essential elements of identity and purpose” (p. 116). These encounters have important civic consequences, as they are often composed for us by powerful institutions attempting to idealize particular modes of citizenship, and thus often “transform” audiences in the process. In the case of the rhetorical experience of Embassy Day, that mode of citizenship ends up a consumptive one, where the tensions between the goals of individual national embassies and the EU construct an ideally globally-minded cosmopolitan citizen that consumes a selection of national brands.

Thus, an appreciation of the complexity of the Embassy Day network and the rhetorical experience it creates allows us to see that, rather than simply constructing a fully idealized version of the EU, Embassy Day showcases the gaps and fissures inherent in reproducing and maintaining such a Union. In Greg Dickinson’s words (2002), “while some cultural texts celebrate the potentialities of fragmentation, other texts respond to the undermining of the seemingly natural,

authentic and stabilized self and the concomitant fragmenting of space/time with a rhetoric of the authentic and natural” (p. 10). In a way, Embassy Day straddles Dickinson’s line here: the organizers clearly are not trying to simulate a so-called “real” European space. At the same time, there’s a symbiotic relationship between the host nation and the locality of Washington, DC, in the proceedings, as European-American restaurants in the area often cater the events and area cultural organizations present dances or sing-alongs and sponsor installations. Thus both the city of Washington and the EU embassies exchange a rhetoric of authenticity onto the other, consonant with the organizers’ attempts to represent a democratizing and forward-looking (but still culturally rooted) Europe. As Barbara Kirshenblatt-Gimblett has noted in studying events at the Smithsonian Festival of American Folklife, authenticity becomes central to organizers as they try to avoid exoticizing performers as cultural spectacles, although this is always difficult in practice (pp. 72–74). The organizers of Embassy Day clearly try to engage in a similar sensitivity, evoking Giorgia Aiello’s (2007) notion that the “network” is itself an important strategic trope by EU’s promotional teams in creating such a forward-looking image, as they consciously emphasize an ideal of cultural exchange and plurality, rather than hierarchy and homogeneity (p. 147).

Mitigating this idealized rhetorical experience, however, is the very *exclusive* nature of Embassy Day, despite it being a very open and free public event. Unlike with Dickinson’s work, say, on city commercial districts or coffee shops, Embassy Day does not exactly represent the “everyday”—it is decidedly *not* every day that we can trespass into these spaces. In architectural historian Jane C. Loeffler’s terms (1998), “Embassies are symbolically charged buildings uniquely defined by domestic politics, foreign affairs, and a complex set of representational requirements” (p. 3). And an embassy makes for a compelling “text,” as it is, by its very nature, a site of transition and liminality, perennially caught between home and host nation, suspended in time and place.⁴ It is both the act of international relations, and the spatial conditions *for* international relations (Robin,

1992). An embassy ends up, then, a guarded space and a microcosm of its national values and policies, but it is also always already defined by values and policies of the foreign country it resides in (Salsbury, 1996).

This makes the cityspace of Washington, DC, as the symbolic backdrop for Embassy Day, a key rhetorical factor in the overall experience. The city is both mired in the history of diplomacy as an almost romantic business of lavish dinner deals and decorum as well as the more recent requirement of diplomacy to become a business of public diplomacy for nations vying for resources and attention. For at least its first century as a national capital, DC was considered a “hardship post”; permanent diplomatic establishments were not founded there until 1866, and only a few at that point were ready to brave the conditions of the city that was still considered a backwater (Calder & de Freytas, 2009, p. 85). As the United States rose to global prominence in the wake of World War I, more and more national delegations purchased property in DC, and by the mid-1930s, an “Embassy Row” stretching along Massachusetts Avenue was established (Murphy & Murphy, 1994, p. 131).

Especially once the decolonization movement after the second world war exploded, an enormous surge of foreign embassies from newly independent countries were scrambling to find space in the city, stretching into private neighborhoods, store fronts, office towers—wherever an inch could be found—causing such havoc that Senator William Fulbright proposed, and eventually enacted, zoning laws in the 1960s around embassy construction (Miller, 1969, pp. 118–20). Still, even in a time of immense transition, the imposing architecture of many of the EU embassies and their usually secretive spaces still cast a kind of nostalgic glamorous pall over these operations. Hope Ridings Miller’s 1969 chronicle of the life of diplomacy on Embassy Row noted that:

the business of entertaining numerous citizens of another country in an effort to reach those who really matter, calls for a combination of elegance and humility not often understood

throughout our country. To appreciate the reasons behind this exceptional blend of pomp and modesty is to understand the basic oddity of diplomacy....The aim is always to impress on distinguished guests the unique character *and* special needs of the homeland...the social round is but a splendid sheath for the work of making friends and influencing powerful factors in a highly competitive world (p. 5).

But she also noted the darker underbelly of embassy work during a time of great upheaval, what she calls the “grim background of the soirees that Harry Truman once called the ‘tragedy under the chandeliers’” (p. 5). Writing during this context of decolonization and through a low ebb of Soviet and Eastern satellite relations, Miller remarked that “A few emissaries represent countries of the highest level of civilization and culture and, at the same time, governments in such desperation as to make their very survival a question” (p. 6). The “show world” of embassy life, therefore, has trafficked in this tension for decades—caught between a strategic promotion of an idyllic but fragile world of handshakes and parties inside embassy walls, while a global apparatus teeters outside against storms of economic and political turmoil.

A further surge of expansion obviously took place during the collapse of the Soviet Union, swelling Washington’s embassy life into a new and even more extensive network of diplomatic relationships, national hopes, and international challenges—and inaugurating a shift toward creating a cohesive national image during democratic transitions. The deals made over lavish dinners and the long history of diplomatic decorum gave way to a more sophisticated appreciation for the role of publics in the conduct of international relations. As Kent Calder and Mariko de Freytas (2009) write, “Traditionally, nations relied heavily on lobbying firms that were dominated by influential former policymakers, often at considerable cost. This pattern has recently changed, as global trade liberalization proceeds and the power of mass media rises, into one that places a higher premium on lower-budget public education. Fostering more understanding and creating affective ties with

Washington residents helps deepen interpersonal networks and thus transnational relationships” (pp. 89–90). Diplomacy, thus, ends up as much a community-building project and integration into the fabric of the embassy’s host city as it does a pursuit of getting face time with elites. As former American Ambassador to France Pamela Harriman has remarked: “An ambassador’s role has changed since the onset of instant communication and the centralization of policy making in Washington. The job is now often one of *public relations* and establishing a prominent presence” (Zaharna & Villalobos, 2000, p. 33).

Embassies are, then, material embodiments of the public diplomacy goals of their host countries and their shifts toward the soft power of nation branding, particularly in the post-communist and post-Cold War era. James Pamment’s study (2011) of the construction of the innovative House of Sweden, for example, demonstrates that the very architectural plan (with its ubiquitous windows, functional block furniture, copious conference spaces, and its publically open first floor) and lobbying mission behind the 2006 building over the Potomac and Rock Creek Park was deliberately coordinated to promote Sweden as a welcoming site of elegant modernity and transparency, thus validating a “nation brand approach to public diplomacy” and symbolically representing an almost utopian vision of Swedish values (pp. 28–29). Moreover, Sweden’s groundbreaking foray into a full-fledged virtual embassy demonstrated a new interpretation of what the political and cultural “space” of embassies could potentially symbolize (Bengtsson, 2011).

While the majority of buildings on the Embassy Day circuit did not have the luxury of being built specifically for the aims of their occupying nation’s public image, each has certainly been adapted to fit these purposes, with the Slovenian reconfiguration and renovation of the Yugoslav embassy being perhaps the best example. The rhetorical experience of embassy visitors, tourists, and other diplomats are thus meticulously constructed by their host nations to convey both a sense of national identity and international aspirations. Embassy Day, in turn, represents a hyper-encapsulation of

these goals. In this light, we can situate Embassy Day as a kind of public-minded cultural activity and exercise in nation branding that is intended to both increase the profile of the host nation for tourists, and involve that embassy informally into the everyday affairs of DC in the hopes of forwarding national diplomatic missions. The city of Washington, then, filters into the ways in which we experience Embassy Day, and furthermore, construct an image of the European Union.

Embassy Day and the Spatial Tensions of Nationalism and Transnationalism

An embassy, then, is both a safe haven from ethnic, national, and global tensions, while a simultaneous material articulation of them—the EU’s open house embodies this especially, as the uneasy transitions to European integration are placed on display. Thus, a defining issue constraining Embassy Day is that the very essence of Europe, for many, has revolved around plurality, which has made articulating a stable EU identity much more difficult (Bachmann & Sidaway, 2008). As Etienne Balibar (2004) writes, “In all its points, Europe is multiple; it is always home to tensions between numerous religious, cultural, linguistic, and political affiliations, numerous readings of history, numerous modes of relations with the rest of the world” (p. 5). The very idea of Europe has been contentious as long as there was something identifiable *as Europe*, most likely because of its ideological aspirations to be more than a geographic site—to exist as a civilizing project always in motion (Heffernan, 2005, p. 574; Derrida, 1992, p. 24). And particularly since the rebuilding and partitioning of Europe after World War II, this idea of “European-ness” as an identity has become a complex, global project (Elden & Bialasiewicz, 2006). To historian Tony Judt (2002), after 1945, Europe “remained to be invented, benefiting from a line drawn under the past and dependent for its credibility on a refusal to acknowledge its own provincial, defensive and exclusive roots” (p.169). That idea of “Europe” was required to always be in suspension, always in a state of *becoming* and embracing the ideal of becoming more inclusive, even as it required exclusionary practices (see Sidaway, 2006; Scott, 2005).

Thus, the EU creates inevitable exclusions as it tries to define its project. Arjun Appadurai (2006) writes that, “One could argue that the still contested European Union is in many ways the most enlightened political formation in the postnational world. Yet, there are two Europes in evidence today: the world of inclusion and multiculturalism in one set of European societies and the anxious xenophobia of what we may call Pim Fortuyn’s Europe (Austria, Romania, Holland, France)” (p. 8). In that way, as much as the EU is able to transcend political borders, it still in many ways has to reinforce them, with individual nationalisms still drawing lines all over the continent. Meanwhile, notions of *who* constitutes a European are waged over geopolitical spaces that, despite globalization, still are often conceived of in Western and Eastern terms (Gonzalez & Hoffman). Embassy Day’s network of the European experience balances these spatial tensions of transnationalism and nationalism that are bound up in the “one Europe” versus the “many Europes”—helping perpetuate, in Anthony Smith’s terms (1995), Europe’s “paradox of unification and fragmentation” (pp. 45–46).

Our first experience of these tensions was through Embassy Day’s main brochure, the “Shortcut to Europe” program, which includes the main street map of downtown Washington, DC, and the four EU embassy routes transposed over it. We began our tour by printing this off at home and consulting it for our strategic plan of action for the day. The front of the brochure contains the slogan, “Experience the best of European culture without the jet lag!,” which supports the overall “Shortcut to Europe” theme. Such a slogan sums up the kind of playful vantage point of the tourist in this reproduction of the EU: experience Europe without having to *experience* it! The EU of Embassy Day is cleaned up and idealized, removed from its complex contexts and detached from the difficulties of actually having to navigate real European territory and its incumbent challenges. Opening up the brochure, each country competes for space on the page with a short blurb advertising events to tourists, in hopes of luring us into visiting their embassies over others,

evidence of the market-based nation-branding that has become an important part of post-Cold War diplomacy. Malta uses its space to tell readers what it is (“located in the center of the Mediterranean and home to one of Europe’s oldest civilizations”); Finland touts its embassy as the first LEED certified green embassy; Croatia promotes itself as the birthplace of the necktie; Hungary promotes contests in which one can win a Rubik’s Cube; Slovakia highlights its “attractive business and investment environments”; and the Delegation of the EU asks us to learn “how the EU delegation and the member countries’ representatives work together” (Passport DC, 2012).

These short descriptions of each nation act as a sensory invitation to cultural pasts and focuses mostly on national *ethnos*; what we see is a potent display combining exceptional masters (the “great” painters, musicians, sculptors, etc.) and everyday folk cultures—a heady mix of high and low, as strudel, pilsner, and goulash are juxtaposed alongside opera, flamenco, and tapestries (borne out in our sensory experiences at each embassy). On the cover and around the border of the map and the national descriptions is a graphic motif of a silhouetted skyline of different architectural symbols that highlight the classic European experience—the Leaning Tower, Westminster Abbey, Greek ruins, the Eiffel Tower, and others. These symbols seem to iconize Europe as an easily recognizable and comprehensible entity, an attempt to add coherence to an otherwise fragmented experience, but still forwarding distinct national brands.

This brochure also includes a “passport” to get stamped at each embassy, an act that is essentially for fun, but also a practice that reminds audiences of the still-bordered, nation-state frame of contemporary Europe. We studiously made sure that we had our program stamped at each embassy we ventured into, and we were proud of the variety and the amount of countries that we got to “visit.” In a way, each node on the network was important for us to “check off”—the more we could reach, the more culture and experience we had amassed in this virtual simulation of Europe; the kind of “cultural capital” that Dickinson (2002) attributes in the fashioning of identities

in public spaces (p. 10). But such a ritual also confirms the power that each nation had in allowing us to enter into very guarded and elite space, and reminds us that despite overtures to the EU, these sites are still national enclosures, above all; that stamp was, in a sense, an endorsement of our ability to traverse particular parts of the network with immunity. In this sense, the nation-state still ultimately has important power over mobility and the judgments over inclusion and exclusion in contemporary Europe, and Embassy Day re-created such power on a micro-level.

Arguably, though, it is the visual display of the map as the center of the brochure that is most compelling: maps have the power of *place*, wherein affixing a particular location to the abstract space represents a powerful political act. For practical purposes, this map tells us where to go in the here and now and how to connect the dots of the new Europe together. Simultaneously, though, the map also can de-territorialize particular locations; here each European nation is networked together, while embassies from the “rest of the world” are omitted and subsumed into the gray background. Every country featured is the same size (a small dot on a network, detached from any relationships to size of area) and our normal expectations of what is North/South, East/West in Europe are shuffled and scrambled. As Andrew Barry (1996) has written, “The Europe of the network does not claim to possess a centre, or a capital or a common culture: it is a surface of mobile and unstable linkages” (p. 36). The leadership, for example, of France, Germany, and the UK in EU politics is nowhere to be seen here, thus elevating the tourist’s power of choice in defining what the parameters and borders will be and idealizing the EU’s ability to bring its members onto a level playing field. At the same time, this map brochure also reveals the power the EU has in labeling what is Europe and what is *not*; Switzerland, Serbia, Norway, Turkey, and others are excluded from the visual display and absent from the celebration of EU culture. The boundaries between politics and culture are fraught and problematic here; we are reminded starkly of the EU as

a contentious political project that prescribes inclusionary and exclusionary practices for its members, all the more jarring considering the festive blend of cultures at each stop.

For our group, this map helped form our initial framing of the European Union on Embassy Day, as it was distributed at our first stop at the Delegation Headquarters. The sleek architecture of the Headquarters was striking, and especially so in hindsight—unlike the opulent embassies in its network, the EU’s building is streamlined, modern, and self-consciously un-decorous (not unlike Sweden’s). After making it through the conveyor belts and scanners at security, we first came across a large timeline constructed on the wall of major European Union events and developments, from its establishment as the European Steel Community to its most recent economic summits. Right away, we were witnessing a visual display that entered the EU into recent European history, giving it a kind of progressive growth right in front of our eyes. Nearby, a puzzle map for children allowed them to place national puzzle-piece cutouts into the outline of Europe, modeling that tension between the shape of individual nations amidst the larger whole.

In one of the main gathering rooms, a series of tables with an enormous amount of literature, pens, notepads, and other EU-related tchotchkes were lined up around the walls. EU reps were placing much of this literature into tote bags for us, including impressive booklets like “Strengthening Parliaments Worldwide,” which emphasized the importance of the EU’s external promotion of democracy (featuring copy such as, “As a global actor consisting of 27 democracies, representing some 500 million people, and the world’s largest donor, the EU has a crucial role to play in support of democracy building efforts in third countries”) (Office for Promotion of Parliamentary Democracy, 2009, p. 18). Pamphlets like these posited the European Union not as the colonial Europe of the past, but as a technocratic kind of model teacher and overseer, developing partner nations to reach democracy in the same way the EU members have.⁵ Another handout, entitled “The European Union: A Guide for Americans,” explained the similarities and differences

of the EU for American tourists and demonstrated its uniqueness (“The European Union is not a federation like the United States. It is neither a state intended to replace existing states, nor an organization for cooperation between governments, like the United Nations....Never before have countries voluntarily agreed to set up common institutions to which they delegate some of their sovereignty so that decisions on specific matters of joint interest can be made democratically at a higher, in this case, European level”) (European Union External Action Committee, 2011, p. 2). Overall, the feel at the EU Delegation Headquarters was a strong and confident European Union of rights, laws, treaties, and constitutions—technologically innovative and connected vitally to the flows of globalization. Here, the transnational network of the European Union was rendered as unified and forward-looking.

As we began, though, to make our way into actual embassies, that vision of a transnational European Union was complicated by the fragmented nationalisms forwarded by national diplomatic professionals and diverse interpretations that each participating nation had of their role in such a Union. In Ginette Verstraete’s writing on Euro-tourism (2010), she has noted that “in a borderless Europe of cultural diversity, tourists from Europe and far beyond flock around with pictures and cultural narratives that connect Europeanness to a variety of unique destinations, sight-seeing (the viewing of images) to site-seeing (the viewing of places), and citizenship to imaginary transportation within a stereotypically differentiated geography of cultural heritage” (p. 10). As we headed from building to building, our group began to see this “differentiated geography,” but curiously transferred onto American soil, with many of the appeals directed to educating Americans on the inclusivity inherent in the EU’s diversity. As Pamment has noted, narratives constructed through public diplomacy are invariably spatial and strategically geopolitical, setting the imaginaries of what is “inside” and “outside” (Pamment, 2014). Over at the Polish embassy, an impressively designed brochure called “An Insider Guide for Outsiders” humorously referenced the

kind of proud nationalism at play in their integration into the supposedly open EU, while poking fun at the aloofness of EU neighbors: “Ask any expat who has decided to settle in Poland. Even if they have been greeted initially with distrust and skepticism by their workmates or future in-laws, now they are a part of the family, or *rodzina*. Try to be the first to leave a Polish party... Sneaking out or leaving quietly is called ‘leaving the English way’ here” (Ministry of Foreign Affairs of the Republic of Poland, 2011, p. 8). At the heart of this invitation is the concept of family, a value that has to be *earned* in Polish culture—the implication, of course, being that Poland’s embrace of its EU “family” takes time and must be earned, with a less than subtle dig at their British allies.

The Polish embassy also projected these national/transnational tensions visually for their visiting audiences. A video presentation detailed the excavation and rebuilding of the Gdansk Shakespeare Theatre, the only Elizabethan-era theatre to be built outside of England during Shakespeare’s time (Gdansk Teatr Szekspirowski). Here was an instance of transnational promotion on Embassy Day—as Poland travels back to a time in its history of prosperity and cultural innovation, and links itself as intimately connected to one of Britain’s most cherished cultural exports. As we watched the video (accompanied by plates of pierogis and cabbage), we see the enormous nationalistic pride on display in this theatre’s resurrection—various heads of state appear and discuss the importance of this stage to Poland’s story of itself. And yet, as cultural dignitaries from all over Europe attend the theater’s dedication and discuss the cross-collaboration in bringing the stage back to life, the attempt to promote a pan-Europeanism is palpable—that the resurgence of Gdansk is simply one instance of the EU’s cultural prominence and revitalization of history. There is a sense of anxiety around the ownership, then, of such cultural space and its accompanying history—does the pride of Polish culture also become the EU’s as well?

Similarly, one of the themes of the Czech embassy experience (our next stop) was the Republic as film mecca. Here, the embassy grounds were converted into a kind of “back lot” for a

film production experience (Embassy of the Czech Republic, 2012). In this controlled simulation, we could visit “Southern Bohemia” and watch how swordfighting is choreographed for films, then go to “Barrandov Studios,” often promoted as the “European Hollywood,” over to Moravia to see crime combat stunt techniques with Rockville City, MD, police officers and their Czech-born German shepherds, and lastly to Brno, which showcases an actress’ live monologue as famous Czech queen Eliskia Rejcka. Once again, the connection of culture and art to both affirmation and transcendence of national borders is key: the Czech Republic owns its cinematic heritage and proudly touts its country as a *space* for film auteurs, and yet also promotes the crossover, global success of these very auteurs like Milos Forman, and their ability to be shared with the world. In addition, this focus on cinema especially emphasizes the ways in which American filmmakers have infiltrated the Czech Republic in order to film there, thus solidifying the cultural bonds of CR with the U.S. and the rest of the world. The importance of space, too, is once again on display: accentuating its claim as the “crossroads” of Europe (and hence central to the European Union), the Czech Republic uses film as simply one example of how the culture of the nation has the capacity to bring *all* of Europe together and transcend political borders.

It is clear that, despite the EU umbrella, each embassy has control in crafting a national image and characterizing its relationship to the transnational network through its own particular “brand.” For example, over at Estonia’s embassy, a video display and an accompanying poster and map installation (re)defined the Baltic nation strategically as a member of the Scandinavian family of Northern Europe. As the video rolled exquisitely photographed videos of idyllic skiing spots and the subtitles referred to the country’s “natural” Scandinavian heritage, the large map nearby centers in on Estonia’s geographic proximity to Finland, Sweden, and Norway, cropping out the majority of the rest of Europe. While the downstairs DVD presentation pays tribute to the stirring “Singing Revolution” that this former SSR fomented, this upstairs display discusses a new identity that sheds

the shadow of the East for a new Northern cloak (Tusty & Tusty, 2011). Through this strategic identification, and its claims to being the most “e-country in Europe” in both the promotional literature and in the displays, Estonia enters itself into a fraternal space of EU-streamlined, techno-savvy social democracies—a branding that is consciously de-Easternizing its national identity (Estonian Tourist Board, 2012).

Overall, as we traveled from embassy to embassy over the network, those spatial tensions between national and transnational affiliation to the European Union came up again and again. And our subjectivities as tourists played an important role in our experience of these tensions. As Verstraete (2010) has written, “The ideal European citizen is someone with a thin connection to any single place—a rootless, flexible, highly educated, and well-traveled cosmopolitan” (p. 8). And even with American tourists, Embassy Day can re-produce that kind of ideal identity, as we wander from nation to nation, soaking up the culture. However, Verstraete has worried that this kind of tourism can also homogenize cultural difference and misleadingly sell an image of “Europeanness” to the global market, as she writes that, “pretending that the recognition of differences is equally empowering to everybody maintains the status quo in the end: it offers a stable mooring for what is historically constructed and substitutes culture, and ultimately ideology for irreducible divisions” (p. 58). Relatedly, Aiello (2007) has written about how the EU has often fashioned a style of promotional communication that creates a “generic ideal of diversity, without the need to pursue less ambiguous and perhaps riskier paths” (pp. 172–73).

In the process, the EU often promotes a kind of “exoticization” of its member nations by focusing on consumption as the ideal mode of citizenship (Aiello, 2012, p. 69). Indeed, Embassy Day’s re-construction of a “tour” through Europe in sight, sound, and taste attempts to model this brand of consumptive, cosmopolitan citizenship, where the veneer of freedom and mobility belies a control of the very meaning of citizenship by powerful institutions (Beasley, 2006). Despite the fun

and playful hipness of some of the Embassy Day displays, for example Sue Curry Jansen (2008) has argued that the seemingly innocuous promotions of nations like Estonia have created a dangerous totalizing of market forces that ironically suppress liberal democracy; the often corporate-produced literature disseminated at events like Embassy Day risk, for Jansen, reducing democratic deliberation to capitalism, and complex rhetorical constructions like nations become products and consumer “lifestyles” (pp. 134–35).

The communication of “civilization and culture” that Hope Ridings Miller wrote about in embassy life is visible in the commercial nationalism at each point on the network through the brochures, foods, and displays—the Gdansk Shakespearean crossover notwithstanding, the Polish embassy evokes a folksy familiarity, while the British embassy supports a more formal and reticent feel, just as the Swedish and Estonian embassies affect a consciously transparent and technocratic ethos in their construction of the rhetorical experience against Croatia’s celebrating of an Old World connection to Mediterranean culture. Once again, this evocation of diversity is consonant with the public goals of the European Union, but the presentation of difference requires asking how much the divergent branding and competition could hamper the supranational political aspirations of the European Union, and how much these kind of neoliberal market nationalisms continue to challenge the EU, albeit in a different form than the traditional nationalisms of European past (Jansen, 2008). To eat the EU’s cuisine, to watch its traditional dancing, to share in its architecture and art, is somehow equated with being a “global citizen” and participating in the EU’s cultural vision of “unity through diversity.” And yet, the very fragmented nature of its presentation of Europe at least challenges the notion of the EU’s unifying project.

Embassy Day and the Temporal Tensions of European Past and Future

One of the most striking ways that Embassy Day creates this fragmented image of the European Union is through the complex appropriations of European pasts made by the embassies on

the network. Of course, this use of time is irreparable from the very spaces where memories are invoked. Hence, each embassy becomes an important site of intersecting memories, and the whole of the Embassy Day network also becomes a super-site of these intersecting memories—a “liminal space” for flows between European pasts, presents, and futures. Margaret A. Lindauer (2011) has discussed how a liminal space is “a circumscribed space but also one of transition, as it typically does not mark a point of destination or place of rest. Thus it is a place that paradoxically seems stable but is always in the process of becoming something else” (p. 94). In the case of Embassy Day, we especially see a host of nations coping with the often tragic history of the 20th century—the forward-looking spirit of the European Union is *always* paradoxically looking back at “other” Europes of both the distant and immediate pasts for models and lessons. The process is, of course, inherently messy and never causal or chronological; as Lindauer argues, “liminal spaces instill a restless sense of cultural, ethnic, community, or national identity” (p. 94).

For Embassy Day, that restlessness may come out of the intersections of local, national, and global memories that arise from the many cultural fragments produced by each embassy. One way to conceive of this intersection is through what Kendall R. Phillips and G. Mitchell Reyes (2011) have defined as a “global memoryscape,” or a “complex landscape upon which memories and memory practices move, come into contact, are contested by, and contest other forms of remembrance; older ways of conceptualizing the past—largely framed in terms of national and local perspectives—are unsettled by the dynamic movements of globalization and new memories and new practices of remembrance emerge” (pp. 13–14). The European Union has dealt with the often unsettling implications of memory management since its inception; Embassy Day concentrates these issues into a transnational network and puts them on display. Writing about tourists walking through a memorial site, Phillips and Reyes remark that “the movement of these tourists...reconfigure the site into a space of multinationally negotiated meaning. The rapidity of

global cultural flows means, in essence, that no localized memory is truly localized” (p. 15). With Embassy Day, the presence of tourists flowing from nation to nation at each embassy creates potent sites for the contestation of memories on local, national, and global levels.

Perhaps the most compelling example, at least in our selective trip around the EU network, was the marshaling of communist public memories and histories by former SSRs and Central/East European satellite nations. As Christine Lavrence (2011) has written: “the tensions between desires for EU membership and calls for national autonomy mediate how the past is being recalled in postcommunist, postwar” contexts (p. 80). Thus, the spaces of the embassies, the visuals on display, and the language used all combine into a fragmentary re-interpretation, and often a cleansing and even omission of 20th century history (see Haskins, 2011). The phenomenon of nation-branding has become especially pronounced (and contested) in the national agendas of Central and Eastern European nations as markers of democratic transition, and the temporal complexities that accompany that loaded term (Szondi, 2007). Over at the Polish embassy, for example, the diplomatic mission emphasizes the Beaux Arts style (from 1910) with its limestone frame and double hung-windows, and accentuates how the embassy has stayed almost entirely the same since 1910, suspended in time, save a few repairs. This tendency to connect back to Polish history *before* the Polish tragedies of almost the entire 20th century is an important part of the embassy’s promotion. For example, the 2nd floor ballroom is dwarfed by an enormous painting, *The Glory of Polish Arms*, commissioned by the embassy just before WWII (by artist Jan Henryk de Rosen), which allegorizes key points of Polish military history from the 1680s right up until the declaration of Polish independence in 1918. The action in the painting is busy, with a host of patriotic icons, and deep reds and golds centered around a triumphant soldier on a white horse. The actual story of the mural in the brochure complicates its visual message:

After the war, the Embassy was taken over by representatives of Poland's communist government, who did not like its Polish patriotic themes, the depiction of Pilsudski, the reference to Soviet defeat, nor the banner with a religious icon of the Black Madonna of Czestochowa. In 1947, they covered the painting with plywood, and it was left forgotten over the decades. When the building was remodeled in the 1980s, the mural was rediscovered, cut into six pieces and shipped off to Warsaw, where it was said to have been lost. The pieces were eventually found in 1992. At this time, Poland was no longer controlled by a communist government. Pieced back together, the painting underwent restoration at the Academy of Fine Arts in Warsaw, then sent back to our Embassy. Today, it hangs in the exact location it was displayed before the war (Embassy of the Republic of Poland, 2012).

This material artifact, thus, embodies the kind of temporal suturing (or a piecing back together) that nations like Poland perform as they connect fragments of national pasts together and stitch them into coherent narratives. The painting and its triumphant restoration and display enacts the notion that 50 years of history were lost to fascism and communism, but were now found again. The implication here is that communism literally concealed Polish history, but hints that the Polish national mission will allow for this history to once again be celebrated—even as Poland (and the EU) makes historical concealments of its own.

The specter of communist pasts, of course, in some of these embassies is made more conspicuous by an overall lack of discussion and engagement with that past. At its embassy event, Estonia bills itself as a “happening little country” and an “open and liberal” place that has “shed its Soviet past...often called e-Estonia or the Baltic Tiger for its high IT accessibility, economic success and its attractiveness to foreign investors” (Estonian Tourist Board, 2012). A series of poster displays and installations bear this out, with placards of “E-stonia” plastered prominently in

the opening ballroom, and with a recurring photo motif featuring a man dressed in medieval armor sitting next to a woman in modern dress looking at a laptop in a coffee shop in an idyllic Estonian village street (Enterprise Estonia Tourist Board, 2010). What this promotion of Estonia's status as a technological vanguard conceals is the contestation of national memory that characterizes the use of transnational cyberpower. For example, the infamous 2007 incident in which Estonian government institutions, banks, and newspapers were attacked by Russian hackers in response to Estonia's controversial removal of a Soviet WWII memorial from a central park in Tallinn goes unmentioned here in the Embassy Day proceedings (Herzog, 2011; Jansen, 2008). Thus, the tension between what EU nations want to expunge from memory and memorialization and what kind of forward-thinking narrative they want to create cannot be fully reconciled, and thus sits uneasily on display here.

While Estonia goes for the sleek, technocratic future despite the complications of its immediate past, Croatia harkens back to a much more distant past. This newest signee into the EU completely abandons the memory of its membership in Yugoslavia; while the literature at the embassy admits a "rich, turbulent, and glorious history," the main slogan is "Croatia: The Mediterranean As It Once Was," with lush photo essays around what has gone "untouched" in the Croatian landscape, and a comprehensive map that organizes itself around "ancient routes" that transport travelers back to Roman times or routes of "Old Sea Captains" that emphasize medieval heritage (Croatian National Tourist Board, 2010a; 2010b). Through these displays, the Croatian diplomatic mission and its government is promoting the image of itself as a "natural" nation, one that would inevitably rise again from its glorious history, the 20th century tumult being a minor blip along its trajectory.

Still the years under Soviet communism punctuate the proceedings of Embassy Day in important ways. In the glossy, stylish brochure, "A Dozen Questions About Estonia," a photo of a

bright yellow and red tractor is accompanied by the caption: “While depicting the future in bright colours, the Soviet agricultural reforms brought about the deportation of thousands of Estonians in 1949.” Underneath that photo is a photo of the Estonian flag, with the caption: “The Estonian tricolor that survived the years of Soviet persecution in the wall of a small primary school in South Estonia” (Estonian Institute, 2011, p. 14). Together, these two photographs constitute a tense interplay that sums up the complex marshaling of 20th century history into the fashioning of new identities for areas like Estonia. The deportation reference hints at the removal of responsibility from everyday Estonians for the enactment of communist rule—that this was an imposition from *outside* by a foreign entity onto a “natural” landscape. And yet the flag photo showcases the pride that democratic principles never left Estonia, they simply had to be preserved as they lie dormant, waiting for Soviet collapse. “The wall of a primary school” becomes a powerful symbol—Estonian principles were passed down through whispers, while they had to be denied “officially” in public.

Another piece of the Estonian brochure, for example, mentions the infamous Molotov-Ribbentrop Pact of 1939, in which “Estonia disappeared from the political map of Europe” as the Soviets “secretly” occupied and annexed the Baltic country, a move, according to the brochure that “the major Western powers never acknowledged *de jure*” (Estonian Institute, 2011, p. 14). The painful reference to Estonia’s invisibility from global space must be seen intertextually with the map-heavy brochures, and the maps of Estonia on the wall throughout the embassy; what was once vanished from the map has been *placed* once again proudly and prominently into the world—just to merely depict Estonia’s shape and its borders is a powerful political statement for the country and an important part of its public diplomacy. Once again, that tense relationship between time and space is brought on display, and articulated through the material artifacts of maps, flags, paintings, photos, and the building itself.

The Lithuanian embassy itself also represents the kind of liminal space where the tragedy of 20th century European history is woven into the material site. According to Carol Highsmith and Ted Landphair (1992), “For fifty years until the cyclonic events of 1990 and 1991, the largest piece of free Lithuania was a 17,000 square-foot plot of land on 16th Street in Washington, an ocean away from the tormented Baltic homeland” (p. 66). And, yet, due to the country’s liminal status, Lithuania was not fully recognized by the U.S., but was also not accepted by them as part of the U.S.S.R. So, the building essentially stayed open through the support of Lithuanian-American organizations—an embassy with no nation to represent. Every year, the Lithuanian delegation would hold a small reception to mark the 1918 independence, and the *Washington Star* would call the longtime Charge D’ Affaires Stasys A. Backis, a “sad-eyed man without a country” (Highsmith and Landphair, 1992, p. 68). Narratives like these were built around positioning the Lithuanian embassy as nobly waiting and guarding Lithuanian ideals and history while the Soviet empire collapsed. The artifacts of these dormant ideals were simply waiting to be found again—when the embassy building was renovated in the 1980s, a 1939 painting by Petras Kalpokas commemorating Lithuania’s declaration of independence was found in the basement and eventually placed right in the opening entry hall, which we gazed on as we walked in. The Lithuanian embassy is caught in-between America and its homeland, democratic and communist ideologies, pasts and futures (Park, 2009). While it now integrates into the EU, the embassy faces a new liminality of commemorating the values of independence, while sacrificing some of those values for the sake of joining the “new Europe.”

Other references to communist rule during Embassy Day contributed to these complex revelations and concealments of recent European history (see Prelli, 2006). In particular, many of these references set off the communist experience as an aberration, a period of time that can be safely detached and examined now from an advantageous distance, often with ironic humor.

Specifically, these memories and experiences are drawn into the frames of tourism, ironically raising capital for European nations while engaging in nostalgia for communism. Lithuania, for example, in two of its brochures promotes peculiar “memory events” being held back on home soil. One invites travelers to spend three hours underground in a Soviet bunker circa 1984:

It’s much more than just a show! Professional actors, accompanied by a wolfhound, accept no compromise...Only here can you be accused of being a KGB informant, smuggling illegal medicine or having way too much foreign currency. These *offences* are punishable by certain physical exercises of being locked in a solitary cell. But if you survive, you will get to taste barley coffee and canned meat, which was very popular during the Soviet period (Lithuanian State Department of Tourism, 2011, p. 11).

Over at the Latvian embassy, a brochure touts a “Soviet Charm Show,” where visitors can “ride in a Soviet-era automobile, enjoy Soviet cuisine, and take part in a Pioneers parade or firefighter and military training” (Latvian Tourism Development Agency, 2005). Rather than the shady KGB underworld of bunkers, Latvia opts for a rosier Soviet nostalgia that presents communist history as quaint and novel—perhaps a reassuringly simpler time than the complex present of integration and economic uncertainties.

Other remembrances of the communist period find pockets of activism to celebrate—re-imagining the drab era as having an exciting underbelly of subversiveness and colorful undergrounds. The four embassies of the Czech and Slovak Republics, Poland, and Hungary were distributing a joint promotional postcard for a film festival called “Humor as Resistance Behind the Iron Curtain” to visitors, a festival featuring a film from each of the four nations (Visegrad Group, 2012). Each film re-interprets communist-era history through wiseguy, counter-culture rebels and rock musicians who bristle against the various regimes (portrayed alternately as menacing and as comically inept) and embrace Western cultural influences (Embassy of the Czech Republic, 2012,

May 25). The four nations, despite their own different experiences of communism, unite in their repudiation of totalitarianism and subtly argue that protest was a part of everyday European life behind the iron curtain, or at least housed a stylish apathy to assure viewers that communism was never accepted into the hearts of citizens. In a way, the isolation of the long and painful Soviet era as “kitsch” can alternately be seen as both a productive, reflective nostalgia, à la Svetlana Boym (2001), as memories that can acknowledge pain with critical, reflexive humor, or as a destructive and offensive distortion of harsh, totalitarian realities. The inability to reconcile these nostalgias into a coherent narrative continues to speak to the immense work that EU member nations have in responding to communist pasts individually and as a whole Union, and the difficulty they face at creating a coherent brand to sell abroad.

Overall, as a whole, the Embassy Day traveler cannot help but sense a deep ambivalence in these EU member nations around recent histories—thorny questions around mass guilt, collective responsibility, and even cultural amnesia mesh together in media as banal as a tourist brochure. National pasts do not vanish, but are appropriated, repackaged, and reinterpreted in complex ways that remind us that both individual nations and the EU must take ownership of these pasts as a unified Europe is attempted to be built. Altogether, each of these different styles in architecture, literatures, and design of the visitors’ rhetorical experience reflects, in Dickinson’s words (1997), “the fragmentation that sets in motion the desire for a unified and unifying past.” And yet, he continues, “as representations of *different* pasts their relations to each other deny the possibility for any singular and singularly meaningful past” (p. 15). The nostalgic sentiment at the Polish embassy, for example, is somewhat mitigated by the almost a-historical EU delegation headquarters, where visitors receive pamphlets on the future opportunities that the Lisbon Treaty is opening up for trade and political consolidation. Together, these fragments bespeak those tensions between both

nationalism and transnationalism, and past and future, as Embassy Day forms a compelling global memoryscape.

Conclusion

As the new millennium unfolds, particularly as its entire viability is questioned by a crippling debt crisis and violent skirmishes in the East, the EU has faced complicated internal questions about what it wants to be, while simultaneously attempting to solidify an external image for the world. For example, an independent report by Sweden's International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance in 2009 was commissioned by the EU to comment on how the Union could craft such an image. Some of the recommendations included: 1) "the EU needs to articulate its own experiences of democracy building, in order to respond to the great interest in the EU story and to inspire political dialogue and shared learning across regions," as "European discourse about itself is often gloomy"; 2) the EU should base its external action on showcasing its internal achievements; and 3) the EU should accentuate its long-term commitment to democracy, as "too often the EU comes off as a trade bloc rather than a fundamental maintainer of democratic principles" (International Institute for Democracy and Electoral Assistance, 2009, p. 7).

Amidst these challenges, Embassy Day can be seen as an external action by the EU to both promote its principles to (mostly) foreign audiences and serve as an opportunity to consolidate its self-identity. In other words, the annual opening of the EU embassies is a chance not just to strategically promote tourism and EU goodwill, but also a performance of attempting to unify the very idea of Europe, an obviously historically fraught and contentious concept. However, what could be gathered from a tour of this embassy network, even in its celebratory mood, was a profound ambivalence, and even anxiety, around the future of the EU, especially as each nation pursues its own public diplomacy goals. The problem of European integration has not erased national pasts, only made them more difficult to navigate. According to M. Lane Bruner (2002),

“national character is most appropriately conceptualized as a constant tension between motivated interpretations of the past and motivated visions of the present and future” (p. 92). In his terms, “national identities are not only assumed to be expressed concretely in property, institutional infrastructures, economic policies, and laws; but they are also assumed to be malleable fictions, assembled out of available historical resources and incessantly negotiated” (p. 3). Integration of former Soviet satellite countries, or those rebuilding after ethnic civil wars, for example, is not just about political, economic, and spatial considerations—it is a question of the value of memory on local and national levels. As Judt (2002) writes:

The new Europe is thus being built upon historical sands at least as shifting in nature as those upon which the post-war edifice was mounted....From Spain to Lithuania the transition from past to present is being recalibrated in the name of a ‘European’ idea which is itself a historical and illusory product, with different meanings in different places....At a time when Euro-chat has turned to the happy topic of disappearing customs barriers and single currencies, the frontiers of memory remain solidly in place (p. 182).

Despite the EU’s enlightened construction of the future, the past continues to erect difficult divisions within and between European nations—and also creates obstacles for today’s Europe. Particularly, as individual nations continue to support a neoliberal vision of marketing themselves as commodities, the European Union will face its own conundrums in forwarding its own brand (Jansen, 2008).

Despite such obstacles, one sure thing is that the EU’s identity is based, in a sense, on always being unfinished. Europe has to continue to argue itself into existence, and to *state* its project. Hence, events like Embassy Day play an important role in this perpetuation. According to Verstraete (2010), “Through treaties, declarations, manuscripts, websites, and capital cities of all kinds, Europe not only constantly declares its existence but also prescribes its future course of

development, and that fact affirms its incompleteness or non-being” (p. 31). And because of globalization, the EU has to justify itself to its own inhabitants as well as the rest of the world. Thus, the media fragments that constitute the European Union, these vehicles by which the idea of “oneness” is communicated, merit our critical attention. As R.B.J. Walker (2000) has noted, “As with concepts of a state or nation, it is all too easy to assume that Europe simply exists and thus to stop thinking about the conditions under which this assumption comes to be taken for granted or how this assumption is put into practice” (pp. 18–19). Rhetorical experiences such as Embassy Day serve as material reminders that Europe continues to be an ongoing, continually evolving site of ideological contest.

Finally, a collection of texts like Embassy Day urges us toward a sensitivity to how rhetoric actually works with popular audiences, and not simply as symbolic representation. For Carole Blair and Neil Michel (1999), “Rhetoric tends toward the naturalized, (too) easy gesture to take ‘text,’ or ‘discourse,’ as an unproblematic container, to see its borders as given in the activity of production and its character designated by its naming (e.g., as a memorial)” (pp. 69–70). To reach beyond this conception necessitates seeing rhetoric as being bigger than itself, as discourses work “not only on audiences but on other discourses.” Embassy Day, then, is not just the symbolic promotion of the EU, but it is also an amalgam of different discourses working on one another, constrained by a host of audiences choosing different entry points into the network and assembling textual fragments. Andrew Wood (2004) has defined “place” as a “strategic practice working to reify its own existence as inevitable” but also a potential for resistance “emerges when visitors occupy the place for their own purposes, practicing new ways to animate the abstract designs of the architect, the designer, or the manager” (p. 291). Seeing Embassy Day as open to both potentials is important: there is an attempt by national governments and a transnational organization to create an image of a diverse,

but unified European Union, while the fragmented experiences of tourists may read such attempts differently.

Overall, as my wife, our friends, and I made the rounds, we noted a kind of prevailing wistfulness—in a sense, the embassies seemed to encapsulate a bygone world of diplomatic palaces. Even with a very future-oriented European Union, the fragments of national nostalgia were powerful, even on tourists who have no ties to the host nations they were visiting. And even if the European Union could not fully control our experience of Embassy Day, it did offer a compelling organizing principle to our virtual travel across Europe. As William Mitchell (2005) has written, “Our sense that a city functions as collective memory and as a crucial site of shared cultural reference depends upon its power to provide virtual as well as physical settings for interchanges among its inhabitants” (p. 9). Embassy Day offered that kind of powerful interchange over the city of DC, even if for a brief six hours—and confirmed that the networks we walk through can speak to us not only about the local landscape, but also about the globe we live in.

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NOTES

¹ Statistic gathered from Embassy of the Czech Republic in Washington, DC, “EU Open House 2012: May 12.”

² Associated Press, “Sarkozy is Latest Leader Booted From Office Amid European Financial Crisis,” *Washington Post*, May 6, 2012; Associated Press, “Greece to Undergo New Election Next Month After Coalition Talks Collapse in Acrimony,” *Washington Post*, May 15, 2012; Associated Press, “Democracy Vs. Austerity: Will Irish Vote Deal Mortal Blow to Europe’s Deficit-Fighting Treaty?,” *Washington Post*, May 13, 2012.

³ For a most recent set of discussions on the relationship between rhetoric and materiality see the collection by Barbara A. Biesecker and John Louis Lucaites, ed., *Rhetoric, Materiality, & Politics*.

⁴ Etymologically, an embassy has come to mean both an envoy of diplomats and an actual material site for diplomacy—and that tension still exists today. Douglas M. MacDowell, “Introduction,” *On the False Embassy (Oration 19)* by Demosthenes, 14–15.

⁵ A curious handout from the EU Delegation that particularly emphasizes this technocratic outlook is the booklet of essay by Robert Billing, a software engineer who wrote a series of science

fiction stories that all center around particular technological innovations that EU scientists are working on. See Robert Billing, *Tales From the Future*.